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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001121

SIPDIS

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/5/2019

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESENTS CREDENTIALS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR KEN GROSS, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 2, 2009 Ambassador Ken Gross presented his credentials to Tajik President Rahmon. Rahmon thanked the U.S. for its assistance and singled out security, border and law enforcement assistance, while appealing for more economic assistance especially in hydropower, pitching for U.S. support for the CASA 1000 project at the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Ambassador thanked Rahmon for Tajikistan's support in coalition efforts in Afghanistan especially for the blanket overflight clearance and participation in the Northern Distribution network (NDN). He raised the importance of Trafficking in Persons issues. President Rahmon gave a long and impassioned speech about problems caused by Uzbekistan and appealed to the U.S. to encourage better cooperation from Uzbekistan. The meeting was followed by a brief press conference and the credentialing got good coverage in the local press. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 2, 2009, accompanied by the DCM, the Defense Attache and the USAID Deputy Country Officer, Ambassador Ken Gross presented his credentials to Tajik President Rahmon. In a meeting following the formalities, Rahmon wished the Ambassador every success and offered his support to strengthen the bilateral relationship, then asked the Ambassador to state his priorities. The Ambassador commented on how the relationship had deepened since his previous time here, noting the completed bridge and increased security cooperation. He thanked the President for Tajikistan's support of coalition efforts in Afghanistan, especially the blanket overflight clearance and participation in NDN. He said the proposed Annual Bilateral Consultations that would take place later this year would be a chance to go over key issues at a high level.

¶3. (SBU) Reading from prepared remarks in Tajik the President said it was very important for Tajikistan to broaden its relationship with the United States and that he conveyed this in his meeting with Secretary Clinton. He said the level of cooperation in the security area was high, especially U.S. assistance to the military and border guards. He appreciated the U.S. role in the region and emphasized that Tajikistan stood at the frontline of the battle against terrorism, extremism and narcotics trafficking, and that given its ties to Afghanistan was placed to make important contributions to the fight. He asked for regular consultations with the U.S on Afghan issues and reemphasized that Tajikistan had provided cooperation as asked without conditions including providing the air corridor

from Manas.

14. (SBU) The President then moved on to the importance of hydropower to stability in the region and said more U.S. investment was needed in general. He praised the U.S.-built bridge at Nizhny Pyanj and asked for a second bridge, saying he had raised this with Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Holbrooke and gotten "positive responses." He noted U.S. help with border guards in both providing facilities and building the capacity of troops, but called on the U.S. to expand its economic presence especially in energy and communications. In particular he asked that the U.S. support the CASA 1000 project which would provide benefits for the entire region both economic and ecological. He said although Uzbekistan opposed it, there would not be any negative impact on any neighbors. For his last point he said he wanted to improve educational cooperation and specifically mentioned a proposal submitted to ACCELS for a National Testing Center. The Ambassador said it was good that the President had raised these issues directly with Washington officials; that we wanted to further strengthen border security and do more joint training with Afghanistan. The U.S. wanted to increase legal trade with Afghanistan and recognized the potential for hydropower in the region.

15. (SBU) At this point a passing reference by the Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank set off a lengthy and impassioned indictment of Uzbekistan and its behavior on many fronts. Switching from Tajik into Russian, the President lambasted malign Uzbek influence in the ADB decision to postpone CASA 100 funding, the closing of Uzbek Tajik borders even to local

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villagers visiting families, Uzbek hoarding of water through new reservoirs that were damaging the Aral Sea, mines along the Uzbek border, the Uzbeks closing down Tajik language schools in Samarkand, Bukhara and other cities with large Tajik-speaking populations. Sending off for a map, he illustrated Uzbekistan's stranglehold on trade and energy routes and described Tajik efforts to build new routes that avoided Uzbekistan. The President asked that the United States use its influence to pressure Uzbekistan to be more cooperative and to respect the rights of ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, saying that if Uzbekistan continued its bad behavior it could destabilize the region further.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador praised Tajikistan's recent improvement on the World Bank's doing business indicators and said we would do more to help attract private investment. He used the President's words on education to raise the issue of bringing Peace Corps to Tajikistan and said we supported increasing exchanges in general. The Ambassador expressed concern that more action was needed on the trafficking in persons (TIP) issue for Tajikistan to avoid a downgrade which could endanger assistance. The President promised cooperation on TIP and threw in high praise for President Obama's speech at the U.N.

17. (SBU) The meeting was followed by a short press briefing at which the Ambassador gave a statement in Tajik about U.S.-Tajik relations. Reporters asked about U.S. assistance and about U.S. views on the upcoming parliamentary elections. The presentation of credentials got good coverage in the local press.

18. (C) Comment: While the meeting started off with straightforward, fairly focused comments, the diversion into the usual screed on Uzbekistan crowded out more discussion of some key issues. The ever present push for hydropower investment

remained a hardy perennial. The President appeared to be satisfied with his meetings with senior U.S. officials at UNGA and clearly was interested in more high-level dialogue with the U.S. especially vis a vis Afghanistan, with perhaps subtle hints that they considered that to be a very reasonable quid pro quo for their open-ended permission for military shipments through and over Tajik territory.

GROSS